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Robert Rutland

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Hawk-Eye Politics Ascendant

The era ushered in by the telegraph soon brought other marvelous changes in the newspaper world. Press techniques were improved to permit more rapid publication. This meant that the laborious methods of the old hand press were outmoded. The next step for progressive journals was to "go daily." An intermediate move for Burlington's two rival newspapers was to begin publication three times a week, thus matching the activity of a third paper, the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*.

In addition to the pressure placed on editors by technological advances there was the strain of the growing slavery crisis. Clarke and Edwards left the scene at the beginning of a decade in which the differences between the North and South came into the sharpest focus and finally pushed the sections into armed conflict. The *Gazette* and the *Hawk-Eye* were not spared from this enmity.

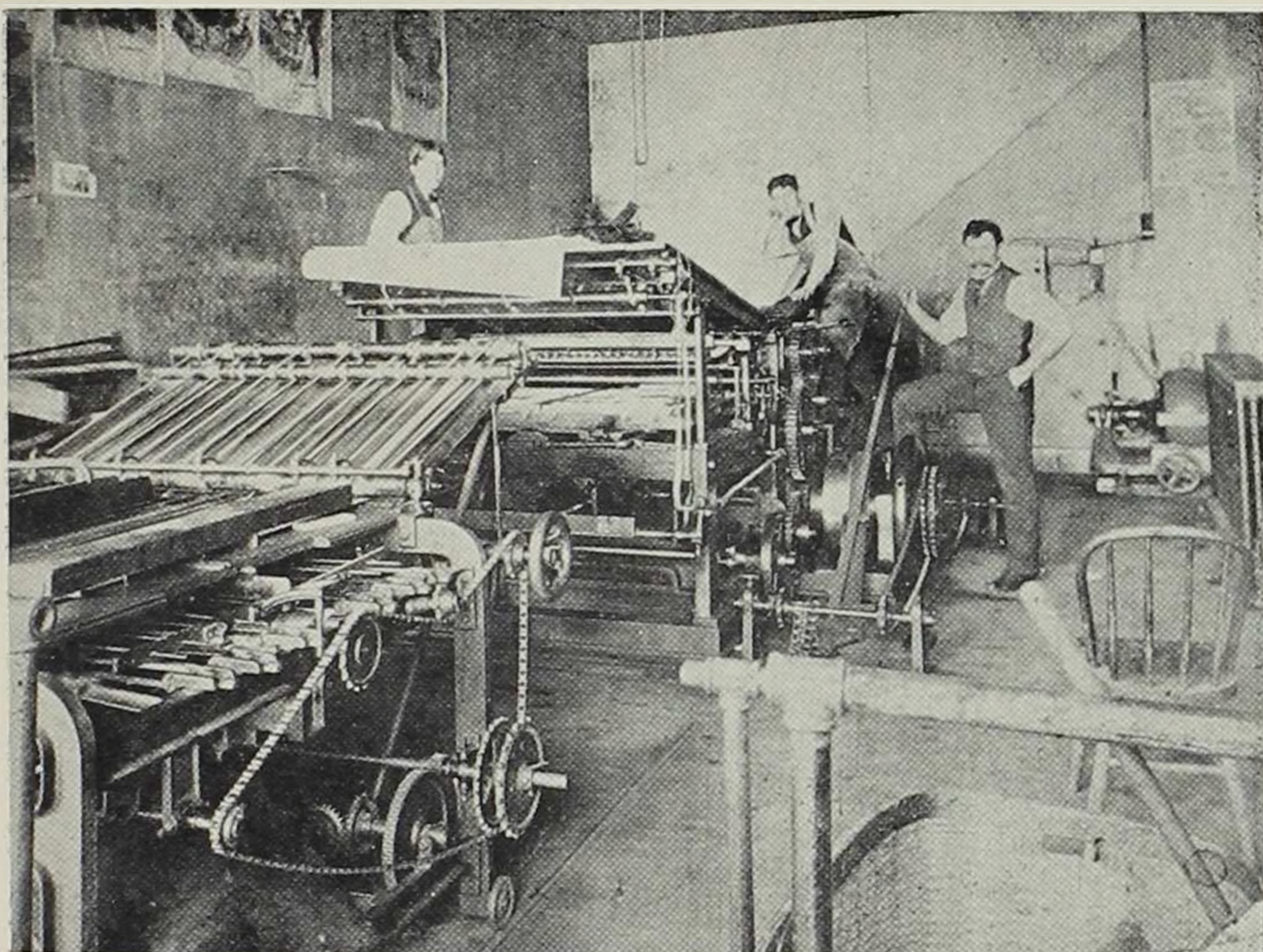
The favors heaped on the *Gazette* by the Democrats had been shared with the *Hawk-Eye*, and official printing for both continued after the Whigs captured the statehouse in 1853. This tacit arrangement doubtless helped both newspapers survive the formative years. Dr. Philip Harvey took over the editorial reigns of the *Gazette* in 1851

and for several years he made his paper one of the chief organs of the Democratic party in Iowa. Harvey championed Senators Dodge and Jones in the great struggle over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, when party passions were easily aroused. Clearly the Whigs were gaining the ascendancy over the slavery issue. In Burlington they had both the *Hawk-Eye* and the newly-formed *Telegraph* espousing their cause. While the *Telegraph* began a daily edition in 1851, not until 1855 could the *Hawk-Eye* take this step, which it accomplished by purchasing the *Telegraph*. For a time the name *Hawk-Eye and Telegraph* was on the masthead, but by 1857 it was changed to the *Daily Hawk-Eye*.

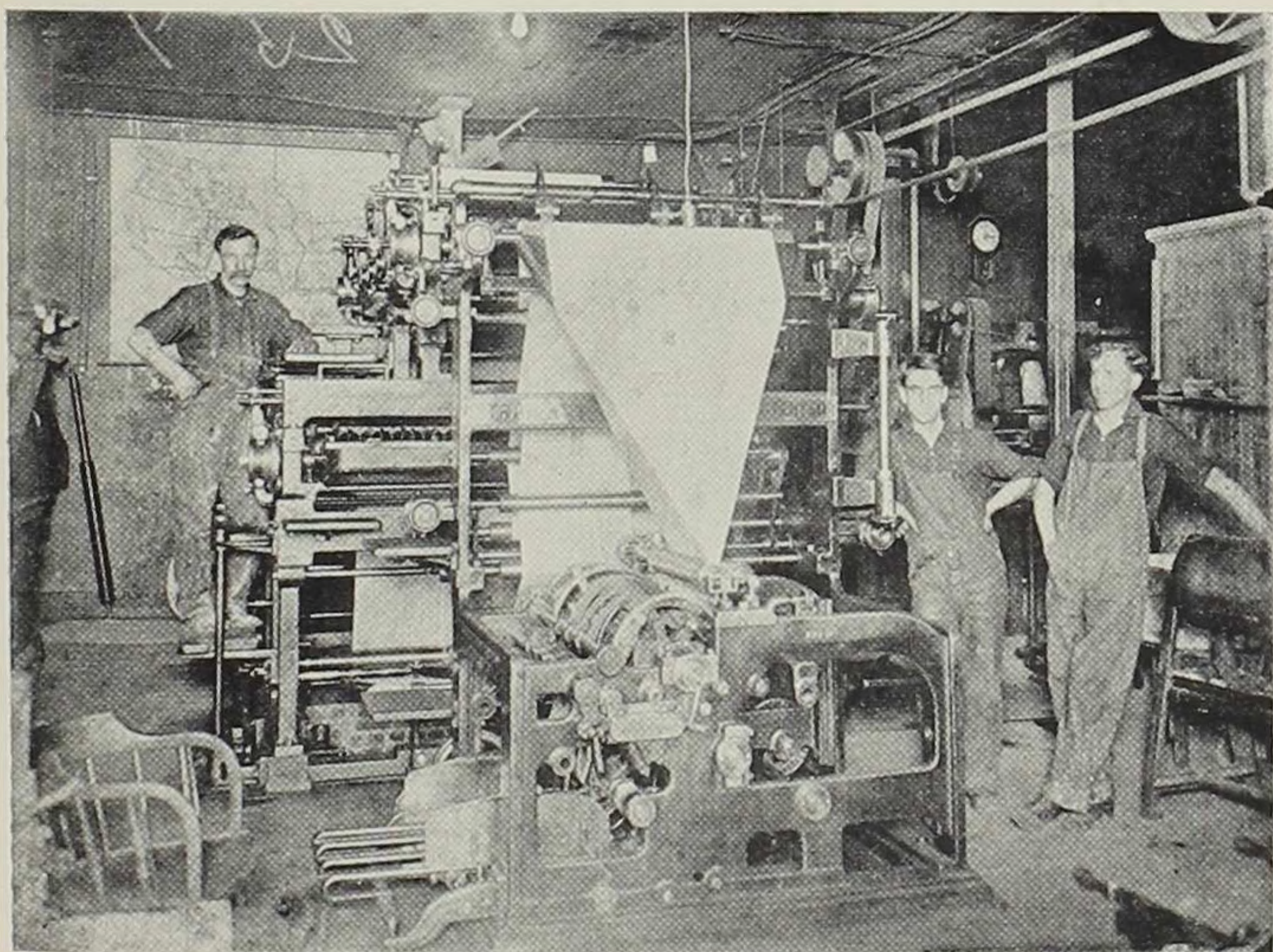
The guiding genius of the *Hawk-Eye* during this period of the impending crisis was Clark Dunham. Dunham fought the Democrats at every turn, helped foster the infant Republican party, and laid the Whig party to rest, convinced that the new group which nominated John C. Fremont for president in 1856 was destined for triumph.

Placing politics aside, there was one issue on which all of the Burlington papers could unite during the 1850's. Railroad building activities in the East crept ever westward. As the decade opened, the papers asked citizens to work for this all-important East-West connection. Their zeal was matched by eastern capitalists, and by March, 1855, the 211-mile iron link with Chicago was

EARLY BURLINGTON PRESSES

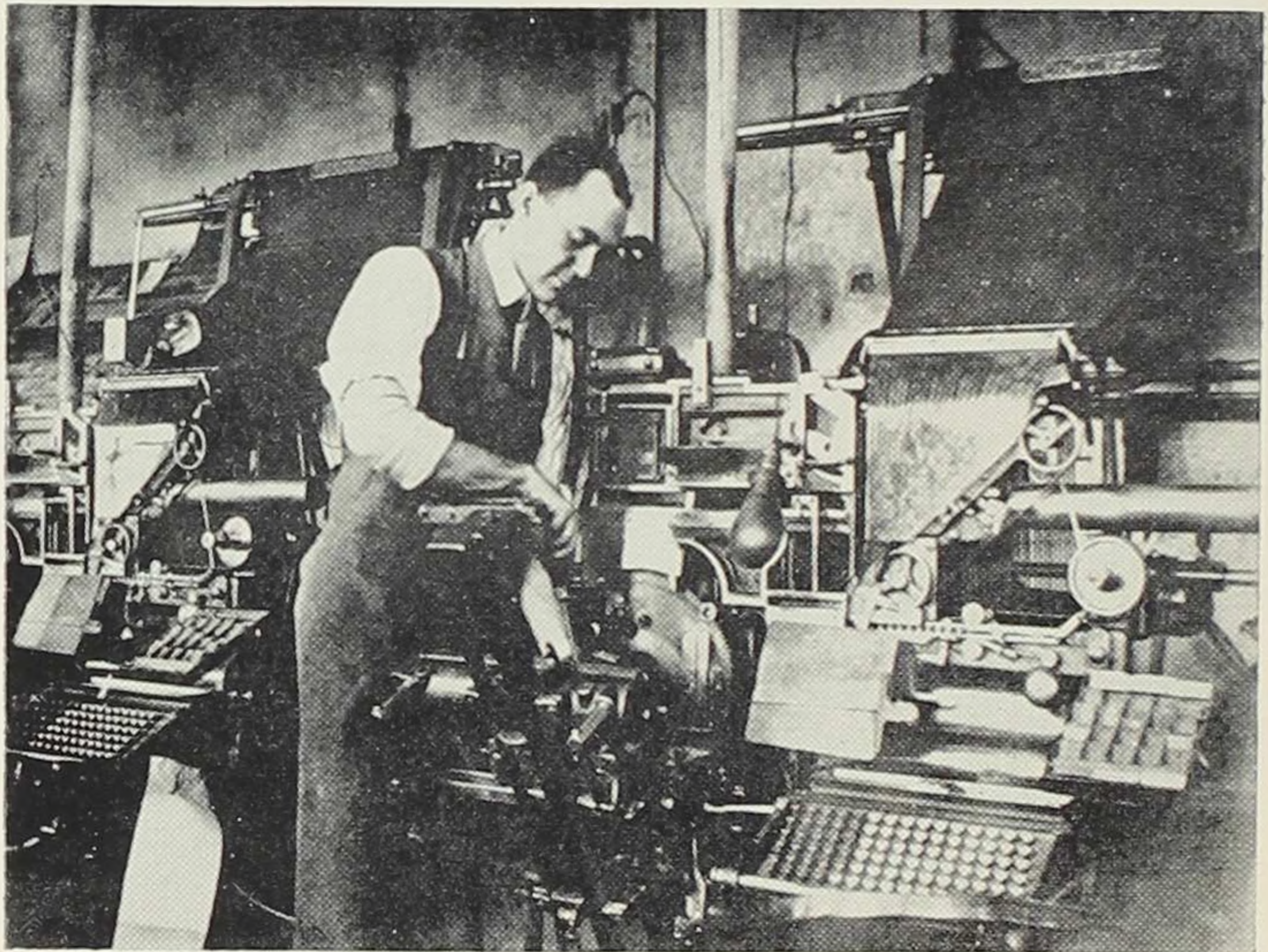


First press of the old Burlington Gazette.
On the right is William G. Fritz, pressroom foreman for over 50 years,
who died in 1948.

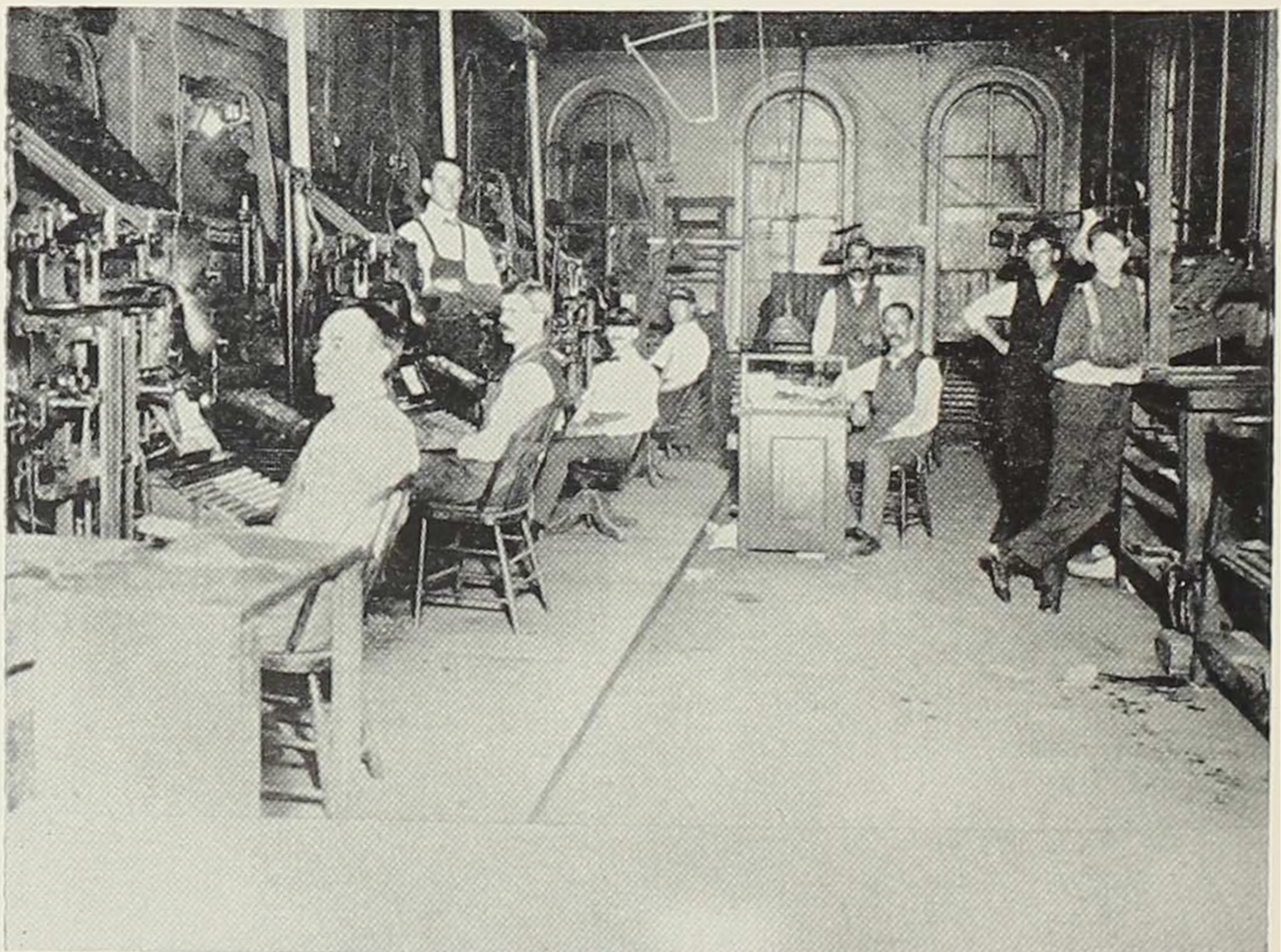


Second press of the old Burlington Gazette.
Left to right: William Fritz, Al Champaign, and Frank Mennen.

EARLY *HAWK-EYE* COMPOSING ROOM SCENES



First Linotype machine in Burlington in old *Hawk-Eye* building.



Composing room staff of old Burlington *Hawk-Eye* about 1898.
L. to r.: Charles Herschenbach, Joe Weiman, W. T. Schmidt, Bill Messmer,
John Taylor, Bill Tell, Bill Lohmann, Bob Fritzsche, Charlie Embeck.

completed. The German newspapers joined with their English language brethren that day to predict still greater prosperity for Iowa.

Then came the panic of 1857, with its general economic distress. The *Hawk-Eye* survived, but the *Iowa Daily State Gazette* faltered. Finally, on April 10, 1859, the proud old newspaper "went busted." Editors William Thompson and David Sheward, who had bought out Dr. Harvey's backers in 1855, blamed their failure on "the tightness of the money market, the *position political* . . . assumed by us, together with the non-response of those who owe us. . . ." With a grand gesture they said farewell to the opposition press and wished it "every degree of happiness and personal prosperity." Apparently, sporadic attempts to revive the *Gazette* were made during the late months of 1859 and 1860 by an editor named Taylor. Taylor died in 1860 and the *Gazette* was again dormant.

Lincoln's election in 1860 made war or peace the burning issue. The *Hawk-Eye* denounced secession as unconstitutional, but thought war unlikely. After the firing on Fort Sumter the *Hawk-Eye* took its stand:

We have a plain case of base treason staring us in the face. In this emergency . . . let loose the dogs of war and let those who have planned or helped to execute this foul treason meet the felon's doom. . . . War to the knife. "Our country right or wrong."

Such emotional response typified the early days of the war. The *Hawk-Eye* circulation mounted with Union tempers, and reached an average of 3,500 copies. Then the holiday from opposition ended early in 1862 when G. M. Todd and A. P. Bentley revived the limp *Gazette* as the *Argus*. Staunch Democrats, they dedicated the newspaper to war on the Republicans, whom they described as the "Abolitionist Party."

During the war years, and particularly at election time, the two newspapers reached the extreme limits of their rivalry. Todd and Bentley changed their masthead frequently, and for the next five years the paper was known variously as the *Argus* and the *Gazette and Argus*. Todd became chairman of the state Democratic Central Committee, with the *Argus* truly serving as the watchful guardian of his party's interests in southeastern Iowa. "Republicanism is dead," the *Argus* proclaimed in 1862. Todd ventured this opinion in the middle of canvassing for an important election, but he could not overlook the flood of ballots which gave his political opponents life. Forced into the role of minority spokesmen, the *Gazette and Argus* editors joined other Democratic newspapers with the slogan, "The Union as it was, the Constitution as it is." Their pleas for conciliation were drowned in the tide of war, although the citizens of Burlington patronized the paper. One historian even declared that the *Weekly Argus*

was "among the most widely circulated papers in the West."

War always brings some difficulties to newspapers. The Civil War brought its share of trials in the telegraph service. "The work of cutting down and making our telegraphic column valueless has been going on for months past, little by little, attended by a large amount of trickery and palpable lying," the *Hawk-Eye* charged. The Chicago terminus was said to be favoring local newspapers by sending out false stories on the wires to country editors. Apparently the difficulty was remedied before the war ended, but not without months of continued complaint against "the Chicago city papers, and the Telegraph monopoly." Prosperity smiled on the *Hawk-Eye* anyway, for wartime improvements included a new steam-operated press which was so efficient Dunham reduced his subscription rate from six to five dollars per year and briefly tried to put out two daily editions, morning and afternoon.

The return of peace brought a plea from the *Hawk-Eye* for understanding rather than a vindictive attitude toward the South. "It will require time . . . to restore the old fraternal feelings between the two sections; and nothing should be left undone by the North which would in any way put back the day of good feeling." This spirit of conciliation was somewhat modified in the years ahead, as the Reconstruction program of the Radi-

cal Republicans received full support from the *Hawk-Eye*. "Hereafter one of the first principles of the Republican party is to be the political equality of all the citizens of this Government," the *Hawk-Eye* declared on January 27, 1866.

This attitude must have seemed, to the editors of the *Gazette and Argus*, much akin to waving the flag before the bull. True to the traditions of their newspaper and party, they were committed to a fight against Negro suffrage. When the battle lines were drawn to amend the state constitution, thus permitting Negroes to vote, the historic feud between the *Hawk-Eye* and the *Gazette* was carried into the postwar era. It was essentially a Republican era, for the Democrats found only feeble support in Iowa and nationally could elect only one presidential candidate (although he was chosen twice) in over a half-century.

The effect of Republican supremacy must have been demoralizing to the *Gazette* editors through those years. Richard Barrett and Charles I. Barker bought out — or perhaps relieved — H. R. Whipple and Bentley in 1867. Barrett soon left the *Gazette* solely in Barker's hands. Despite the handicap of generally supporting the losing side in political frays, Barker dressed up his newspaper with new type and showed other signs of prosperity. A Burlington historian wrote of Barker: "He was an active man in the [Democratic] party and contributed much toward the mainte-

nance of the organization through the dark days of continued Democratic defeat." The complete Republican domination led to factionalism within its ranks, which doubtless delighted editor Barker. The *Hawk-Eye* had passed from Dunham to George W. Edwards and Charles Beardsley. They were critical of Congressman William B. Allison's senatorial ambitions in 1872, and were among the editors who stood by Senator James B. Harlan. When Allison defeated Harlan the *Hawk-Eye* proved a hard loser, but conceded Allison's stature long before his 35-year Senate tenure ended in 1908.

Both newspapers survived the Panic of 1873 which halted the inflationary spiral of the postwar period. Agrarian unrest in Iowa soon brought political rumbling that disturbed both major parties, with a third party splinter group eventually founding the Anti-Monopoly party in 1873. A year later the *Hawk-Eye* staff was reorganized and Robert J. Burdette joined the staff. This happy event Burdette later described —

While I was looking around for something to do I thought of the Burlington *Hawk-Eye*. It was a sober, staid old paper, financially solid. I was young and active. Thought I, I can do that paper good. If I can get on the staff I am sure it will do me good. Well, I was thinking of going over there, when one day its business manager, Mr. Wheeler, came to see me, and offered me a position as city editor and reporter. If I live ten thousand years it will not be long enough time for me to be sufficiently

thankful that I accepted the offer, and besides that, I am proud of the fact they sent for me.

Burdette was only thirty years old at the time, a war veteran who had drifted through several jobs without settling down. Burlington then had a population of about 15,000, with many citizens still believing their city was destined to rival St. Louis or Chicago as the queen city of the Midwest. The people were, as a veteran newsman later recalled, taking themselves a bit too seriously. Robert Burdette made them laugh.

Burdette's technique put him in the same category as the more famous humorists of the nineteenth century — Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, and Petroleum V. Nasby. His humor appealed to readers everywhere, and the *Hawk-Eye* achieved a nationwide circulation through popularity of his "Hawk-Eyetems" column. Local happenings and politics he savored. Hometown minutia was grist for his mill:

Nobody in Burlington cares anything about star-gazing, and the sight of a comet or a runaway balloon wouldn't attract half a dozen gazers to the window, but three-fifths of the population of this lovely city are suffering from the most agonizing ache in the back of the neck, brought on by looking straight up at the dim, distant outlines of the first strawberries, barely in sight and slowly coming within reach at about two dollars a dozen to begin with.

Politically, Burdette favored the Republicans, which meant that he rarely passed a chance to

"roast" the Democrats. Politics were not his forte, though, for his appreciation of the common experiences of mankind led him to excel on such a topic as "Carpet Shaking as a Fine Art." In "Dangers of Bathing" he prescribed rules for the old fashioned swimming hole for youngsters, item by item, and one read:

4. If convenient, bathe very near a railroad bridge. Then when a passenger train comes thundering by, you can rush out of the water and dance and shriek on the bank. Travelers like this, and if your uncle Jasper from Waterloo, or your father returning from Creston, should happen to be on the train and recognize you, they will tell you what the passengers said about it, and your father will be so pleased that he will assist you in a little physical exercise so essential to the health after bathing.

Burdette's fame spread so that in 1877 he began a lecture tour that eventually took him across the nation. He was known as the "Hawk-Eye man," and continued to send letters known as "Robert's Ramblings" for *Hawk-Eye* readers after he severed ties with Burlington in 1880.

By 1880 both the *Hawk-Eye* and the *Gazette* editors had seen technical progress undreamed of in 1838 by their papers' founders. The *Hawk-Eye* was dominant in Burlington, however, with a better financial position, greater circulation, and the latest printing equipment. Perhaps this prosperity was in part due to the fortunes of the Republican party in Iowa, for hand-in-hand the

Hawk-Eye had marched with the new party and seen it rise from a minority group to the unquestioned major political force in Iowa.

ROBERT RUTLAND